



Avoiding Negative Self-Talk

Are you surprised at how badly you sometimes treat yourself? We should be our own best friends – our biggest fans. Instead, when we get into a difficult situation, a voice in our head screams:

- "I can't do that!"
- "I'm not good enough."
- "I'm not athletic."
- "I couldn't carry a tune in a bucket."

Sometimes it seems like it never stops. But it can.

Negative self-talk is a habit that people develop to protect themselves. They use it to keep themselves from trying things that may be scary or uncomfortable. "I can't do this" may really be a way of saying: "I don't want to deal with failing at this."

We are strongly influenced by our feelings; they often determine what action we ultimately take. If you're feeling uncomfortable, that negative voice kicks in, and you may decide to take no action at all.

But our feelings don't have to control us. We have the ability to choose the emotions we have. If you don't like feeling guilty, frustrated or doubtful, you can choose not to. It's not easy, but in order to become successful at making healthy choices, you must avoid negative self-talk and begin to cultivate the habit of positive thinking.

Identify Key Situations

The first step is to understand and identify those situations that give rise to negative feelings. Does an inner voice say you're an unhealthy eater if you give in to that ice cream craving? Does it scream you're a failure as your colleague ridicules you in front of your boss?

As you begin to understand your reasons for negative self-talk, and the situations in which it occurs, you'll find yourself recognizing it more quickly when it starts. Eventually, with practice, you can replace the negative thoughts with positive ones before they even occur.

As you practice, it's very important to consistently acknowledge the positive changes you make in your life. Did you make healthy food choices this week? Did you speak to the colleague about her behavior? If so, give yourself a mental pat on the back.

Strategies

1. List any counterproductive thoughts that occur to you in a given situation.
2. Develop a list of challenges or counter-beliefs (positive self-talk) that counteract the negative thoughts. These should be realistic, useful, believable and believed. Direct them towards one's thoughts rather than one's feelings or emotions, and make them as powerful or persuasive as possible.
3. Once you have identified counterproductive thoughts and developed challenges to those thoughts, practice substituting the challenges until they are second nature in real life.

Remember, there are bound to be times when you feel frustrated, depressed or inadequate. Positive thinkers know that these feelings are valid, and they don't try to ignore them. Just acknowledge the thoughts, work to understand them, and try not to blame yourself for the conditions that lead to those feelings.

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